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S E C R E T GUATEMALA 000776

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2019
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR POLICE FIRED FOR STEALING COCAINE,
INVESTIGATIONS UNDERWAY

REF: A. GUATEMALA 0756
[1](#)B. GUATEMALA 0734

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Drew Blakeney for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (S) On August 7 President Colom ordered the firing of four senior police officers after they were implicated in a partially successful police heist of more than 1000 kilograms of cocaine. The Attorney General's Office is now investigating at least 23 police officers. The Attorney General visited the Ambassador August 10, seeking political support for this unprecedented investigation. Successors were immediately named to fill the four police vacancies. A CICIG investigation of the new National Police Chief, Baltazar Gomez Barrios, is underway for his possibly having ordered counternarcotics police to steal a load of cocaine on a separate occasion. Gomez has, however, previously passed NAS polygraph tests, and leading human rights activist Helen Mack had no objection to his appointment. This incident has put the police on notice that, thanks to the new, USG-supported wire tapping unit at the AG's Office, there are new risks associated with doing business as usual. End Summary.

Top Police Fired, Under Investigation

[1](#)2. (U) On August 7 President Colom, via Minister of Government Raul Velasquez, fired four top National Civilian Police (PNC) officers implicated in the August 6 attempted theft of more 1000 kilograms of cocaine in a northern part of Guatemala City (ref a). The fired officers are:
-- Director General (the country's top police officer) Porfirio Perez Paniagua, already under investigation for the theft in June of \$300,000 from a crime scene;
-- Deputy Director General Rolando Mendoza Perez, previously accused of coercion;
-- Deputy Director of Operations Victor de Jesus Lopez, previously accused of fraud; and
-- Deputy Director of Investigations Hector Castellanos, previously accused of abuse of authority and disobedience.

[1](#)3. (C) All four were present at the scene of the August 6 incident, according to press. Perez Paniagua told reporters on August 6 that only 300 kilograms of cocaine had been seized. (Note: The Attorney General told the Ambassador he suspected that more than 1600 kilograms had been on the truck, some of which police had already removed and hidden when investigators arrived. Eight hundred and eighty-one kilograms were in fact seized.) Additionally, former Deputy

Director of the Division for Criminal Investigations (DINC) Orlando Villatoro is a fugitive from justice. Telephone intercepts implicate Villatoro as having organized the heist. In all, at least 23 police officers who were identified at the crime scene are now under investigation.

14. (S) Attorney General Amilcar Velasquez and his Secretary General, Gloria Porras (protect) told the Ambassador August 10 that telephone intercepts indicated that the police had removed at least 300 kilograms to a house near where the truck was found, but said they did not have legal authority to search all the houses in the area. Both anticipated that some of the implicated police would soon be murdered as the unidentified owners of the stolen cocaine attempted to recover it. Velasquez and Porras said there was essentially no doubt as to the senior police officers' culpability. The telephone intercepts and GPS records taken from their vehicles were incriminating. The officers' written statements all contradicted each other, and Castellanos' statement had been written by a lawyer.

AG Seeks USG Political Cover

15. (S) Velasquez and Porras sought the Ambassador's support for this unprecedented operation to uncover police corruption and complicity in narcotics trafficking. The intelligence for the operation was generated by the USG-supported Special Methods Unit, which is the AG's wire-tapping office. They said they hoped to ultimately prosecute some 50 police officers for this crime, but said they were worried because they "do not know how high up this goes." The Ambassador agreed to reaffirm USG support for the operation during his

next conversation with President Colom. On August 12, Porras told a NAS member that she had received a death threat, which she suspected had come from a police officer implicated in the Aug. 6 crime.

New Police Director Under CICIG Investigation

16. (S) Asked about the newly named replacements for the four (see below), AG Velasquez and SecGen Porras said they did not have an informed opinion, but noted that the UN-led International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) is investigating new Director General Baltazar Gomez Barrios for possibly having ordered an April operation in Amatitlan, in which five SAIA (the Anti-Narcotics Intelligence and Analysis Service) officers were killed (ref b). Baltazar Gomez was the SAIA Director at the time. CICIG suspects that the officers were attempting to steal a load of cocaine belonging to the Zetas when the Zetas returned and opened fire.

17. (S) On August 11, CICIG's Chief of Investigations told Pol/Econ Couns that CICIG is first investigating the five SAIA officers who survived the Amatitlan raid. As they begin to cooperate with investigators, the investigation will move to the next phase, targeting Baltazar Gomez and other SAIA leaders. At a bare minimum, the CICIG official said, Gomez is guilty of covering up wrongdoing by his fellow SAIA officers.

18. (U) The four replacement officers are:
-- Director General Baltazar Gomez Barrios;
-- Deputy Director General Geovanny Leal Yaxcal;
-- Deputy Director of Operations Jaime Leonel Otzin Diaz; and
-- Deputy Director of Investigations Benigno Ottoniel Barraza Martinez.

Asked by reporters about an accusation that in 2002, when he was Deputy Director of the now-defunct Department of Anti-Narcotics Operations (DOAN), Baltazar Gomez participated in the theft of approximately 1600 kilograms of cocaine from a DOAN warehouse, Minister of Government Raul Velasquez responded that a thorough investigation had cleared Gomez of any wrongdoing.

19. (C) On August 10, Pol/Econ Counselor and NAS Director

asked leading civil society activist Helen Mack, of the Myrna Mack Foundation, if she had any reservations about Baltazar Gomez assuming the leadership of the PNC. Mack said she was unaware of any derogatory information on Gomez or the other three appointees, but that she suspected new Minister of Government Raul Velasquez and his closest advisors of corruption. The PNC's performance would only be as good as the guidance it received from above, she asserted. NAS Director said that, while reserving judgment, he was encouraged that Gomez had passed two NAS polygraph tests. In a separate conversation with Pol/Econ Couns, former Minister of Government Salvador Gandara -- who himself was credibly accused of corruption more than ten years ago -- said he viewed the SAIA under Baltazar Gomez's leadership as essentially a narcotrafficking organization, but provided no details. (When he was Minister, Gandara never asked the USG to work for Gomez's removal.)

Comment

¶10. (C) We are encouraged by the AG Office's actions in this case, and by the prospect of senior officers facing criminal prosecution -- as opposed to just administrative discipline -- for criminal wrongdoing. However, we anticipate that the fired police officers will prove formidable adversaries with substantial capacity for manipulating the judiciary, and maybe the government as well. AG Velasquez and SecGen Porras' concerns about the consequences of this unprecedented action are well founded. As for new PNC Director Baltazar Gomez, we derive some comfort from his having passed two polygraph tests, but are concerned by the role he may have played in the Amatitlan operation. Embassy will remain in close contact with CICIG about how its investigation of Gomez is developing.

McFarland